

Abstract ID : 86

Title : Enriching the environment of female sea otters (*Enhydra lutris*) with the addition of a young male at the Shedd Aquarium

Category : Behavior

Student : Not Applicable

Preferred Format : Poster Presentation

Abstract : A few aquariums house sea otters (*Enhydra lutris*) for public display and this provides a unique opportunity to study their behavior. Zookeepers use environmental enrichment to create a variety of activities for animals and to optimize the animals' psychological and physiological well-being. Enrichment includes addition of toys, habitat modification, introduction of sounds or scents, variation of food, introduction of a new conspecific, food dispensers, animal training and human interactions. However; minimal data are available on whether these activities truly stimulate the animals. We introduced a sub-adult male Alaskan sea otter to a group of three females at the John G. Shedd Aquarium to determine: 1) whether the females' usage of the facility changed, 2) whether the females' time-budget changed, and 3) which female(s) spent the most time and interactions with the male. Biting, rubbing, licking/biting and squeezing by female otters occurred significantly more before the male's introduction. Feeding, gaping, rolling, and blowing behaviors by females did not change. Female usage of specific areas in the facility correlated with the male's location. The male was observed primarily with one female, Kachemak. He only spent 9.4 % of the time alone, off public display after introduction to the females. This study provides the zoo and aquarium community insights on the introduction of a new individual as an enriching experience to captive female sea otters.